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CHARLES LAMB

IN HIS

RELATIONS TO THE STAGE

BY

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CHARLES LAMB IN HIS RELATION TO THE STAGE

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INTRODUCTION

Charles Lamb played his part on the stage of English Literature in the latter part of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. He lived in that period of great revolution which affected not only government, but religion, society, and literature as well. The leaders of the Classicists of the eighteenth century had made their exits from the stage of literature and the curtain rose at the beginning of the nineteenth century upon a group of enthusiastic Romanticists. William Blake was imitating the Shakespearian lyrics; Wordsworth was worshipping nature; Scott was depicting medieval life; Coleridge was lecturing on Shakespeare; and Lamb was delving in the musty manuscripts of the British museum for the plays of the old Elizabethan dramatists.

In this period the intellectual horizon was broadening, thanks partly to the newspapers and magazines that were established. The Times and the Morning Post were founded during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The Edinburgh Review was started in 1802; the London Quarterly in 1809; Blackwood's Magazine in 1817; and the Spectator in 1828. These magazines were supported by the best literary writers of the day. Their contributions included criticisms on books, current literature, plays, and the stage; so that the time may well be called a period of criticism. Charles Lamb contributed to several of these magazines, and it is principally through these contributions that we have learned of his relation to the stage.

The purpose of this thesis is to show this relation to be that of a thorough-going romanticist. We shall endeavor to prove our case by reviewing Lamb's life, and noting his romantic nature; by showing his dramatic criticisms to be those of an impressionist; and by analyzing his plays, and pointing out the causes of his failure as a dramatist.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LIFE OF LAMB

Charles Lamb, the "most lovable" figure in English literature, was born February 10, 1775, at the Inner Temple, London, which was his home for the first seventeen years of his life. His father John Lamb was a clerk and servant of Samuel Salt, a bencher, who depended upon his clerk to despatch his business. While Salt lived he provided for John Lamb and his family, but after his death they experienced financial troubles.

From the description of the father, represented as Lovel in the essay "Old Benchers," Charles must have inherited some of his father's characteristics. "Lovel was a man of incorrigible and losing honesty. . . In the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents. . . He was the liveliest little fellow breathing, had a face as gay as Garrick's, . . .possessed a fine turn for humorous poetry, moulded heads in clay to admiration, by the dint of natural genius merely; turned cribbage boards, . . .had the merriest quips and conceits, and was altogether asbrimful of rogueries and inventions as you could desire." The father had written poetical pieces for certain occasions, and it was from him that the three children, John, Mary, and Charles, inherited their literary taste. But they inherited from him another characteristic, a taint of insanity, which made their lives a tragedy.

Through the essays of Lamb we learn something of his childhood. When quite young, he and Mary spent some time with their

grandmother, Mrs. Field, who was the housekeeper in an old country place at Blakesware in Hertfordshire. In the essay "Blakesmoore in H____shire," he gives us a glimpse of his wonderful imagination as a child. The pictures and tapestries of the old house had "magic" in them. He studied them until he was familiar with all the different scenes and characters. When in his bed, he would shift the coverlids to peep at the tapestries, but after catching sight of some "stern visage," he would quickly cover his head. In "The Witch Aunt" one of the stories included in Mrs. Leicester's School he refers to Glanvil's witch stories and Salmon's Modern History with its Chinese gods and great hooded serpents, as the favorite books of his childhood. After reading these stories, "One night," he says, "I became terrified in my sleep, I got out of bed and crept to an adjoining room, where my aunt usually sat. The old lady was sitting with her eyes half open, half closed, her spectacles tottering on her nose; her head nodding over her prayer book; her lips mumbling the words she read; all this with the dead of night joined to produce a wicked fancy in me, that the form I beheld was not my aunt but some witch."[1] He tells how, when morning came, the fancy passed away, but when night returned he could not quite determine whether the woman he saw was his aunt or a witch. He says he labored for weeks under the illusion, "it was my aunt, and it was not my aunt."[1]

When he was seven years of age he entered Christ's Hospital, through the influence of his benefactor Samuel Salt. In the essay, "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago," he de-

[1]Lucas, The Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 1, p.5.

scribes the school as "an institution to assist those who are the most willing, but not always the most able to help themselves." Here he met Coleridge, his life-long friend. In this school the students became familiar with the classics. Their severe master moulded their taste for Demosthenes, Homer, and Virgil. They were taught to compare Greek and Roman poets, "and on grounds of plain sense and universal logic to see and assert the superiority of the former in the truth of nativeness both of their thoughts and diction."[1] Coleridge says, "At the same time that we were studying the Greek tragic poets, he made us read Shakespeare and Milton as lessons; and they were the lessons, too, which required most time and trouble to bring up, so as to escape his censure. . . In the truly great poets, he would say, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word."[1] This training prepared Coleridge and Lamb for the criticisms in which they later engaged. Lamb attended the school from 1782 to 1789. He did not enter the highest class called the Grecians, as they were supposed to take holy orders in the church. An impediment in Lamb's speech prevented him from qualifying for this class, although he had the reputation of being a good classic scholar.

Preparation for Lamb's literary career was not obtained entirely at school. Samuel Salt had a library into which Charles and Mary Lamb, "tumbled by accident or design, a spacious closet of good old English reading without much selection or prohibition," and here these young people "browsed at will upon that fair and

[1]Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, vol. 1, p.4.

wholesome pasturage."[1] Here Lamb first became acquainted not only with Shakespeare, but with Beaumont and Fletcher, whom, as early as 1796, he quotes with enthusiasm.[2]

Lamb's acquaintance with the theater began when he was six years of age. His godfather Francis Fielde associated with some of the actors of Drury Lane Theater, and at his pleasure received tickets for their performances. It was due to this favor that Charles Lamb, in company with his parents, attended his first play, which really was an opera entitled Artaxerxes, composed by Thomas A. Arne.[3] The boy of six years was enchanted by its oriental splendor. In the essay "My First Play" he says, "I had dabbled a little in Universal History -- the ancient part of it -- and here was the court of Persia. -- I took no proper interest in the action going on, for I understood not its import -- but I heard the word Darius, and I was in the midst of Daniel. All feeling was absorbed in vision. Gorgeous vests, gardens, palaces, princesses, passed before me. I knew not players. I was in Persepolis for the time, and the burning idol of their devotion almost converted me into a worshipper. I was awe-struck, and believed those significations to be something more than elemental fires." The second play he attended was The Lady of the Manor, a comic opera by Dr.Kenrick.[4] Of this play Lamb had faint recollections. The third play of the season of 1781 and 1782 which he witnessed was The Way of the World by Congreve. During this play Lamb sat "grave as a judge" thinking

[1] Essays of Elia, "Mackery End."
[2] Ainger, English Men of Letters, vol. 5, p.36.
[3] Baker, Biographia Dramatica, vol. 2, p.38.
[4] Ibid. p.361.

"the hysteric affectations of Lady Wishfort were solemn tragic passions."[1]

All play-going was forbidden during the school period at Christ's Hospital. After a lapse of seven years Lamb again attended the theater. He had never forgotten the thrill of his first play, when he "felt all, loved all, wondered all." He expected to experience the same feeling, but something had happened. Lamb says, "I had left the temple a devotee, and I returned a rationalist . . . The green curtain was no longer a veil drawn between two worlds . . . but a quantity of green baize, which was to separate the audience for a given time from their fellow men who were to come forward and pretend those parts."[1] The thrill did not come! Would it come again?

Soon after leaving school Charles Lamb entered the South Sea House as a clerk, but in April 1792 he changed to the East India House with which he was employed as an accountant for thirty years. He was retired in 1822 with a pension.

During the first years of Lamb's employment the family was in poor financial circumstances, Samuel Salt having died in 1792. Charles did not receive a salary until he had served three years in probation. Mary Lamb helped to meet expenses by taking in sewing.

With poverty came another great sorrow. Mary, tired out from her labor, became enraged at one of her apprentices. Mrs. Lamb interfered to rescue the girl, when Mary in a fit of insanity stabbed her mother. From this time Charles Lamb who was then

[1] Essays of Elia, "My First Play."

twenty-one years of age assumed the responsibility of the home. In a letter to his friend Coleridge he wrote, "God has preserved me in my senses . . . I am left to take care of my poor father and aunt . . . Thank God, I am calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write, as religious a letter as possible . . .I charge you don't think of coming to see me. Write. I will not see you if you come."[1] Coleridge in a letter which Lamb termed "an inestimable treasure" replied, "I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God; we cannot arive at any portion of heavenly bliss without in some measure imitating Christ. And they arrive at the largest inheritance who imitate the most difficult parts of his character, and bowed down and crushed under foot, cry in fullness of faith, 'Father, thy will be done.' You are a temporary sharer in human miseries that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine nature." Charles' tender love for his sister, and his great sympathy for humanity in general, manifested throughout his whole life, proved Coleridge's words to be a true prophecy. It may be noted here that Charles Lamb had spent six weeks in an asylum at Hoxton during the last part of 1795 and the first part of 1796. After the father's death Charles brought Mary home when her condition permitted, but the periods of her insanity frequently returned. "A friend of Lamb's has related how on one occasion he met the brother and sister at such a season, walking hand in hand across the fields to the old

[1]Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb, vol. 1, p.44.
[2]Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 1, p.95.

asylum, bathed in tears."[1]

But "between the acts" Mary was intelligent and her interest in literature made her very companionable for her brother. They read, studied, and wrote together. The pleasure he enjoyed in the home with his sister may be guessed from these words of Lamb. "She has left me very lonely and very miserable . . . There is no rest but at one's fireside, and there is no rest for me there now. . . . It cuts great slices out of the time, the little time we shall have to live together."[2] How like the words of a devoted husband!

Lamb found relief from the burdens of sorrow and labor in the theater. During the thirty years of employment at the East India House Lamb always felt the restraint, and wished for a few years between the "grave and the desk." He says, "I sit like Philomel all day (but not singing) with my breast against this thorn of a desk."[3] But in the theater he forgot his troubles. His disillusion of the stage after his return from Christ's Hospital did not destroy for all time his enjoyment of the theater. Soon after his disillusion he saw Mrs. Siddon in Isabella, and experienced genuine emotions again. From this time the theater became a favorite recreation. After 1789 he was a good theater goer. He said, if it had not been for his stuttering he might have become an actor. Although it is probable that he received complimentary tickets through the influence of his godfather Fielde, yet he refers to the economy he and his sister practiced in order to "squeeze out

[1] Ainger, English Men of Letters, vol. 5, p.33.
[2] Ibid. p.95.
[3] Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 2, p.86.

a few shillings" that they might sit in the gallery three or four times each season. In the essay on "Old China," Cousin Bridget, who was in truth his sister Mary, tells how he was ashamed for bringing her to the gallery, but, says she, "when the curtain went up, what cared we for our place in the house, when our thoughts were with Rosalind in Arden, or with Viola at the court of Illyria?" Then she refers to his pride saying, "now we can only pay our money and walk in. You cannot see, you say, in the galleries now. I am sure we saw, and heard too, well enough then -- but sight, and all, I think is gone with our poverty."

At different times Lamb's salary had been increased, until he could maintain a comfortable home. By this time his literary reputation had made a place for him in the social life of London, particularly with literary men and players. He refers to the honor of having been admitted to the tea table of Miss Kelly; of having chatted with Mrs. Charles Kemble, and conversed as friend to friend with her accomplished husband; of having been indulged with a classical conference with Macready; of having been entertained in the Player-picture gallery at Mr. Matthews'. No doubt Lamb had other friends among the stage folk, as he seemed well acquainted with personal characteristics of John Kemble, Dickey Suett, John Palmer, Elliston, Liston and Munden.

In 1882 the Lambs visited Paris and were entertained by James Kenny the dramatist, who was at that time living in Paris. He introduced Lamb to Talma the tragedian, who was playing in Regulus. It was arranged that Lamb should attend the theater and afterward sup with Talma at the Hotel de l'Europa. During the evening Lamb having paid no compliment to the tragedian, Talma asked

his opinion of the performance, but Lamb only smiled. "Ah!" said Talma, "I was not happy tonight; you must see me in Sylla.'" -- "'Incidit in Scyllam,'" said Lamb, "'qui vult vitare Charybdim.'" "Ah! you are a rogue; you are a great rogue," said Talma, shaking him cordially by the hand as they parted.[1]

Of all the actresses Lamb was partial to Fanny Kelly. His admiration ended in love. This was his second romance, the first having taken place before 1795, while visiting at Blakesware. After seeing Miss Kelly play Rachel in The Jovial Crew he went home and wrote her a letter of proposal. She may have been prepared for this letter by his favorable criticism in The Examiner in which he said, "What a lass that were to go gypsying through the world with." In the letter he first complimented her on "a most consummate piece of acting," then after expressing his sympathy for some sorrow, he continued, "Would to God you were released from this way of life; that you could bring your mind to consent to take your lot with us, and throw off forever the whole burden of your profession." He asked her to consider it at leisure, then referred to his income, and in a modest way continued: "I am not so foolish as not to know that I am most unworthy for such a one as you, but you have for years been a principal object in my mind. In many a sweet assumed character I have learned to love you, but simply as F. M. Kelly. I love you better than them all. Can you quit these shadows of existence and come and be a reality to us? As plainly and frankly as I have seen you give or refuse assent in some feigned scene, so frankly do me the justice to answer me."[2]

[1]Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 2, p.88.
[2]Ibid. vol. 2, p.15.

Kenny with a tremulous pleasure, announces that there is a crowd to the ninth representation of his new comedy, of which Lamb lays down his cards to inquire; or Ayrton, mildly radiant whispers the continued triumph of Don Giovanni, for which Lamb, incapable of opera, is happy to take his word. Now and then an actor glances at us from 'the rich Cathay' of the world behind the scenes -- Liston, grave beneath the weight of the town's regards -- or Miss Kelly unexhausted in spirit by alternating the drolleries of high farce with the terrible pathos of melodrama, or Charles Kemble mirrors the chivalry of thought, and ennobles the party by bending on them looks beaming with the aristocracy of nature."[1] On these occasions, Talfourd says: "Becky lays the cloth on the side table, under the direction of the most quiet, sensible, and kind of women -- who soon compels the younger and more hungry of the guests to partake largely of the cold roast lamb or boiled beef, the heaps of smoking roasted potatoes, and the vast jug of porter . . . As the hot water and its accompaniments appear, and the severities of whist relax, the light of conversation thickens: Hazlitt catching the influence of the spirit from which he has lately begun to abstain, utters some fine criticism with struggling emphasis; emphasis; Lamb stammers out puns suggestive of wisdom; while Mary Lamb moves gently about to see that each modest stranger is duly served." These evenings were very informal, the guests rose and helped themselves when it suited them. Often, when Lamb became quite jubilant, he would run to Mary and slap her on the back. Hazlitt in his essay "On the Conversation of Authors" says, "How we got into the heart of controversy! How we

[1]Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 1, p.374.

Miss Kelly's "divine plain face" had won other suitors and twice in her career, she was fired at on the stage by some mad lover. Miss Kelly returned an answer, the same day she received it, declining his proposal, but showing her respect in the following words, "I am not insensible to the high honor which the preference of such a mind as yours confers upon me."[1] After another short, humorous letter in which Lamb asked that they might remain friends, the curtain descended upon this short love scene, and the romance of his life was ended. Yet, it might be interesting to relate that Miss Kelly continued her visits to the Lambs' and she died unmarried at the age of ninety-two.

The Lambs had many friends and received invitations where they met people of social rank as well as literary friends. Besides this social life, Charles Lamb was a member of a club composed of contributors to the London Magazine. Among the members were Southey, Hazlitt, Hunt, Charles and Robert Lloyd. If Coleridge or Wordsworth were in town they were present. The evenings were spent in criticism and discussions of current literature, books, and authors. Not infrequently Lamb, who was susceptible to intoxicants imbibed too much on these occasions. The stimulant enabled him to talk more easily, but affected his sensitive nerves.

But most delightful of all such companionship was the open house kept by Lamb on Wednesday nights, after he became financially able to entertain his friends. Talfourd gives an interesting picture of one of these evenings held at No. 4 Inner Temple. The room decorated with Hogarth prints is set with whist-tables. Charles is sitting intently playing, when about ten o'clock the room begins to fill. Talfourd says, "In slouches Hazlitt from the theater . . .

skimmed the cream of criticism! How we picked the marrow of authors!"[1]

Lamb did not permit the illusion of the theater, or companionship of his friends to occupy all his hours of recreation. As we have already noted, he enjoyed the quiet fireside, his book, and the companionship of his sister. In the essay "Mackery End in Hertfordshire" he says, "We are both great readers in different directions. While I am hanging over (for the thousandth time) some passage in old Burton or one of his strange contemporaries, she is abstracted in some modern tale or adventure . . . Out-of-the-way humours and opinions -- heads with some diverting twist in them -- the oddities of authorship, please me most." He was delighted with Walton's Complete Angler and fascinated by the Confessions of Rousseau. For a time he was under the influence of the sentimentalists Richardson and Sterne,[2] but most of all he enjoyed the old Elizabethan dramatists.

He spent vacation hours in picture galleries, or browsed about old book stalls seeking this rare literature. During his life he collected a library of some size and value. The brother and sister made sacrifices when they were poor in order to purchase books. Charles wore an "old brown suit until his friends cried shame" in order to buy a folio of Beaumont and Fletcher for fifteen or sixteen shillings. Again Cousin Bridget, in the essay "Old China", says: "Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase, and had not come to the determination till it was near ten o'clock of the Saturday night,

[1]Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 1, p.378.
[2]Ainger, English Men of Letters, vol. 5, p.36.

when you set off from Islington fearing you should be too late." Charles Lamb wakened the book-seller and secured the coveted volume. After returning home he insisted, in his boyish impatience, that Mary should repair some loose leaves that night, he could not wait till morning.

In personal appearance Lamb was somewhat odd and antiquated. In dress he looked like a minister. The French critic, Philarete Chasles, has given an interesting description of him. He says: "I was at James Valpy's one evening in June, 1818 . . . when a little, dark, old fellow came in; one could only distinguish a head, then big shoulders, then a delicate body, and finally two artistically slender legs, which were almost imperceptible. Under his arm was a green umbrella, and over his eyes a very old hat. Wit, sweetness, melancholy, and gaiety gushed forth in torrents from this extra-ordinary physiognomy . . . There was neither health, nor strength and scarcely sufficient anatomical reality on those poor spindles, clothed in stockings of Chinese silk, ending in impossible feet, encased in large shoes, which placed flatly on the ground advanced slowly in the manner of a web-footed creature. But one did not notice these singularities one saw only the magnificiently developed forehead, on which his lustrous black hair curled naturally, the great, sad eyes . . . the excessively fine nostrils . . . the curves of the nose very like that of Jean Jaques in his portraits. . . .The pose of the head lent dignity -- intellectual dignity to this weakly and disproportioned organization."[1]

[1]Lucas, The Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 2, p. 8.

Lamb was affectionate and sympathetic. The epithets "lovable" and "gentle-hearted" are frequently used to characterize him. His devotion to his sister was extraordinary. He bestowed paternal affections upon Emma Isola, an orphan, whom he adopted. Lamb, early in life assumed the responsibilities of a man, yet he was always a "boy", never having lost the fancies and imagination of his childhood. He was highly emotional, and passed from moods of melancholy to joyous hilarity. His environment played upon his emotions as the wind upon a lyre. At times he was perverse and blunt, especially in the presence of those who disliked him. He was humorous. He loved jokes and puns. He remarked to Macready, "that the last breath he drew in, he wished might be through a pipe, and exhaled in a pun."[1] He was whimsical in his writings, and his dearest friends were sometimes the victims of his jokes. He said, "of all lies" he ever "put off" he valued the biographies of Liston and Munden, as they were all "pure invention and has passed for gospel." It was his sympathetic nature and his frolicsome disposition, together with natural refinement and good sense that drew so many friends to his Wednesday evenings.

Lamb was a romanticist. He turned away from modern literature and sought the old romantic literature in old book stalls. He was an antiquarian in belles lettres. He loved old London. It was as romantic to him, as the Lake Region was to Wordsworth. Yet, in the essay "Dream Children," Lamb sees nature as a romanticist. He says: "I had more pleasure in strolling about among old melancholy looking yew trees, or lying about upon the fresh grass with all the

[1]Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb, vol. 2, p.260.

garden smells, or basking in the orangery till I could fancy myself ripening along with the oranges and limes in their grateful warmth." Yet he has more fascination for the nature of man, and it is this that he is seeking in the old English literature. He is original, his Lambisms are inimitable. He is subjective, his biography may be read in his works for he expresses himself in all his writings. But one of the most interesting of his romantic characteristics is the enjoyment of emotion. He says, "I would scarce now have any of those untoward accidents and events of my life reversed . . . Methinks it is better that I should have pined away seven of my goldenest years when I was thrall to the fair hair and fairer eyes of Alice W. than that so passionate a love adventure should be lost."[1] In writing to Coleridge of his experience in the asylum he says, "I look back on it at times with a glowing kind of envy; for while it lasted, I had many hours of pure happiness. Dream not Coleridge of having tasted all the grandeur and wildness of fancy till you have gone mad."[2]

Lamb's greatest desire was to become a dramatist, but, he won his fame in English literature as an essayist. The Essays of Elia alone would rank him high among essayists. He has written about twenty dramatic essays which we purpose to discuss in the second chapter.

In 1796 Lamb began what proved to be an extensive letter writing of literary importance. Coleridge and Wordsworth were his first literary correspondents. His letters contain criticisms of

[1] Elia Essays, "New Year's Eve."
[2] Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb, Letters, vol. 1, p.22.

their poems. He kept in touch with many of his friends through letters. Among these friends were Hunt, Robert and Charles Lloyd, Hazlitt, Talfourd, whom Lamb introduced as "my only admirer," Payne, and Godwin.

In 1807, The Tales of Shakespeare were published. Charles Lamb is responsible for Lear, Macbeth, Timon, Romeo, Hamlet, and Othello, but Mary Lamb did the rest with some assistance from her brother. In these stories the authors have interwoven phrases of Shakespeare which in beauty and imagination had appealed to them in childhood. These stories made Shakespeare a more familiar and popular author. This collection was "one of the most conspicuous landmarks in the history of the romantic movement."[1]

Through the friendship of Coleridge, Lamb became interested in writing poetry, but few of his poems, however, are well known. His early poems were published in a collection with those of Coleridge and Charles Lloyd. Coleridge sometimes made changes in Lamb's poems, to which Lamb objected. He wrote to Coleridge saying, "I love my sonnets because they are the reflected images of my own feelings at different times . . . I love my own feelings: they are dear to memory, though they now and then wake a sigh or a tear. 'Thinking on divers things foredone,' I charge you, Coleridge, spare my ewe lambs; . . . in a sonnet, a personal poem, I do not 'ask my friend the aiding verse.' I would not wrong your feelings by proposing any improvements in such personal poems."[2] One of these sonnets in which Lamb has expressed his own feelings, is to Miss

[1]Cambridge History of English Literature, vol. 12, p.209.
[2]Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb, vol. 1, p.25.

Kelly.

"You are not Kelly of the common strain,
That stoop their pride and female honour down
To please that many headed beast the town,
And vend their lavish smiles and tricks for gain;
By fortune thrown amid the actor's train,
You keep your native dignity of thought;
The plaudits that attend you come unsought,
As tributes due unto your natural vein,
Your tears have passion in them and a grace
Of genuine freshness, which our hearts avow;
Your smiles are winds whose ways we cannot trace,
And vanish and return we know not how --
And please the better from a pensive face
And thoughtful eye, and a reflecting brow."

But essays, letters and poetry were not the goal of Lamb's ambition. He wanted most of all to become a disciple of Shakespeare. When he was twenty-five years of age he began to write his first drama, John Woodvil a tragedy. His next attempt was a farce entitled Mr. H., the only one of his plays presented on the stage. After several years he added two more plays to his list, a tragi-comedy called The Wife's Trial and a farce called The Pawnbroker's Daughter. Each of these plays will be discussed in the third chapter.

We may conclude this chapter by saying that Lamb's life is one of the most interesting of English writers. His life was beautiful and it was tragical. He had the disadvantages of physical weakness from childhood. He inherited a strain of insanity. He experienced a tragedy in his own family. He struggled for a time with poverty as well as sorrow. He was twice disappointed in love. He suffered the loss of his dearest friend, Coleridge. But in spite of all his disappointments and sorrow Lamb met the situation with fortitude. His sense of humor afforded a mental balance. From some broken fragments he pieced together a home which he enjoyed

with his friends. He lived to see his genius recognized. He could smile at the world though his smile was tinged with sadness. What a delightful comedian he might have been, if it had not been for his stammering tongue. It may be truthfully said, his life was a tragi-comedy.

CHAPTER TWO

LAMB AS A CRITIC

When the Romanticists of the nineteenth century played an important role in English literature, they had in their group critics who were representative of the romantic movement. These critics sought to express their imagination and emotion as well as the poets. They were impressionists who depended not on their judgment but on their sensibility. "Their business with a work of art was to feel keenly its charm, to describe accurately the impression that it made upon them, and so to transmit their pleasure to the reader."[1] In England this method originated with the revival of interest in Medieval life and in the Elizabethan poetry. These works were "indefensible before a literal interpretation of the Aristotelian law."[2] . . . The method "rose in response to a demand for some one who would dare to be pleased without giving a reason why."[1]

Charles Lamb was one who dared. He with Hazlitt and Hunt formed "the most winsome group of English impressionists."[3] They were all lovers of the stage and possessed knowledge, insight, and imagination, but Lamb was a general favorite. Brander Matthews says, "Coleridge bids us 'compare Charles Lamb's exquisite criticisms on Shakespeare with Hazlitt's round and round imitation of

[1]Sherman, Matthew Arnold, How to Know Him. p.152.
[2]Ibid. p.151.
[3]Ibid. p.152.

them; and to Leigh Hunt such a comparison would be less favorable."[1]

As a critic of Shakespeare and his followers, Lamb had no predecessor for his master. He was original in his work. However, in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, Colley Cibber had skillfully portrayed a gallery of English actors, and it is with him that Lamb seems to vie in his portrayal of the Old Actors. "It is not easy to say which is the more artful, as a painter of players, Colley Cibber or Charles Lamb. Beside the full length portraits of Betterton, Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Bracebridge -- speaking likeness every one of them, soundly drawn and mellow in color, -- may be placed the group from Twelfth Night, which we find in the 'Essays of Elia,' -- Mrs. Jordan as Viola, Bensley as Malvolio, Dodd as Sir Andrew, and Dicky Suett as the clown. And Cibber of course was wholly without the boundless humour that has depicted for us a few of the five hundred faces of Munden."[2]

Among the English critics none is entitled to speak with more authority on the Old English Dramatists than Charles Lamb. His letters and essays show that he was devoted to Shakespeare, and that he spent many happy hours in reading the plays of the Elizabethan dramatists. "He lived in communion with this older literature. It was to him inexhaustible in amount and excellence and he was impatient with what sought to turn his attention from it."[3] But Lamb did not confine himself to the old literature, he read extensively; and boasted that he could read anything he called a book, that Shaftesbury was not too genteel nor Jonathan Wild too low. He

[1] Matthews, The Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb. p.13.
[2] Ibid. p.13.
[3] Ainger, English Men of Letters. Vol. 5, p.185.

not only read extensively but he criticised "deeply and discursively," a habit that resulted from his training at Christ's Hospital.

Besides his knowledge of literature and his artistic taste, his play-going habit prepared him for the work of a critic. As David Garrick, in the eighteenth century, had revived a new interest in the acting of Shakespeare's plays, which had not abated in Lamb's day, he was privileged to see the great master-pieces again and again, with different actors appearing in the same role.

Besides these acquirements Lamb possessed native qualities for a critic. Arnold says, "The critic who rightly appreciates a great man or a great work, and who can tell us faithfully what we may expect from their study and what they can do for us; he is the critic we want, by whatever method, intuitive or historical, he may have managed to get his knowledge."[1] Lamb's intelligence, his powerful imagination and emotion enabled him to appreciate a "great work." It was the divine gift of imagination which enabled him to reproduce the spirit of the dramatist and to transmit his pleasure to the reader. The tragic experiences of his life cultivated a native affection and sympathy to a high degree. He sympathized with humanity in general, but particularly with those whose hearts were burdened with sorrow. As Coleridge says, he was "A man called by sorrow and a strange desolation of hopes . . . set apart and made peculiar to God." His sense of humor seemed akin to pathos, as if it were an outlet for deeper emotions. These native qualities of the man enabled him to enter the world of illusion or make-believe

[1] Works of Matthew Arnold. Vol. 10, p.245.

of the stage. He could sense the situation of the characters of a play, and his keen poetic insight passed judgment on the excellence of the poet or actor.

A good critic, Arnold says, should be well informed, intelligent, disinterested, open-minded, sympathetic, elastic in mind, and cheerful.[1] Lamb possessed most of these qualifications, but he was not disinterested, or always open-minded. He was affected by his environment, and biased by his likes and dislikes. What he disliked he ignored, and what he liked he had a tendency to exaggerate. In a whimsical way he mixed fact and fiction. He was fond of the paradox. Because of his whimsical writing he has been called the "Ariel of Criticism."

As an impressionist his excellence was due to his sensibility. The thing he liked best was his standard of criticism. He was charmed with the Old Actors and the plays of Shakespeare. He compared all acting with that of his favorite Old Actors, and all plays with those of Shakespeare.

Lamb's criticisms have an informal note about them. They seem written for the benefit of the reader and not to gain prominence for the author. Some are contained in letters written to his friends. Godwin and Robert Lloyd were two of his correspondents who received letters containing interesting dramatic ideas. Godwin sought Lamb's help on his tragedies and received some valuable hints from him. Brander Matthews says, "These two letters[2] of Lamb to Godwin should be studied by all who seek for success on the stage.

[1] Works of Matthew Arnold. Vol. 10, p.245.
[2] Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb, Letters. Vol. 1, p.52.

They are full not only of that criticism of life which is the only true criticism of Literature, but of a knowledge of stage devices, and of the means whereby an audience may be taken captive, very remarkable in one who could not apply his own precepts."[1] In a letter to Robert Lloyd[2] we read Lamb's interpretation of Shakespeare's villain Richard the Third, and his criticism of Cook's impersonation of that character, but we shall refer to these later in this chapter.

But most of Lamb's criticisms are included in essays which were published in the magazines. The most valuable of these essays from the dramatic standpoint are: "On Some of the Old Actors," in which he gives portraits of the characters in Twelfth Night; "The Tragedies of Shakespeare," in which he discusses their fitness for the stage; "The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," in which he upholds Congreve and Wycherley's plays; and "Stage Illusions," in which he gives some valuable ideas for actors. The most important of his criticisms in its influence on English literature is Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare, published in 1808. From these Specimens Lamb made a selection which was published in 1818 with his collected works.

After Lamb had assumed the responsibilities of a man he sought in the theater his world of illusion, and here he found solace from the tragedy of real life. To him the dramatis personae seemed to belong to another realm; they were "fictitious and half-believed personages" who were not to be judged by the courts of

[1]Matthews, Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb. p.19.
[2]See note 2, p. 24. Ibid. p.43.

common law, but "in proportion to the illusion they produced." The principle of illusion was the basis of Lamb's criticism of the theater as opposed to realism. Lamb attended the theater to forget the reality of life, not to confirm it. He did not wish to see his brothers, aunts, and kinsfolk on the stage.

I

The degree of illusion, however, must depend upon the character and play. "Comedians may be too natural."[1] A comedy does not require the same degree of credibility as serious play. "Macbeth must see the dagger . . . but an old fool in a farce may think he sees something and by conscious words and looks express it, as plainly as he can speak, to pit, box, and gallery."[1] Lamb's sensibility passes judgment against any notion that is "repugnant to the moral sense." He says the actor would show artistic skill by taking the audience partly into his confidence when playing certain parts. For instance, "to see a coward done to the life upon a stage would produce anything but mirth. Yet," he says, "we most of us remember Jack Bannister's cowards. Could anything be more agreeable, more pleasant? We loved the rogues. How was this affected but by the exquisite art of the actor in a perpetual subinsinuation to us, the spectators, even in the extremity of the shaking fit that he was not half such a coward as we took him for?"[1] A real miser is also repugnant to Lamb's sensibility, but this character may be made endurable to the audience when the actor "disarms the character of a

[1] "Stage Illusions."

great deal of its odiousness by seeming to engage our compassion for the insecure tenure by which he holds his money bags and parchment."[1] Likewise, in acting an old man the actor "should be a "pleasant counterfeit just enough of a likeness to recognize without pressing upon us the uneasy sense of reality."[1] This illusion may be manifested by different tricks. Jack Palmer's villains had two voices, one for the audience and one for the dramatis personae.

Lamb's mind was alert to the artist's skill and his sensitive soul registered all the degrees and varieties of emotion. He saw the facial expression, he heard the melody of the voice and detected its note of mirth or of sorrow. His soul was stirred by nobility and greatness of character. According to the depths to which his soul was stirred, and to the amount of enjoyment received, he measured the artistic skill of the players.

Lamb points out that the purpose of acting is "to arrest the spectator's eye upon form and gesture so as to gain a more favorable hearing."[1] He gives a most illuminating description of the facial expression of Dodd in Aguecheek. He says, "You could see the first dawn of an idea stealing slowly over his countenance, climbing up little by little, with a painful process, till it cleared up at last to the fulness of a twilight conception -- its highest meridian. ... A glimmer of understanding would appear in the corner of his eye, and for lack of fuel go out again. A part of his forehead would catch a little intelligence, and be a long time in communicating it to the remainder."[2] Lamb has used superlatives in describing Munden's faces, the "strange combinations" which he "shot his proper

[1]"Stage Illusions."
[2]"On Some of the Old Actors."

countenance into." He was "not one but legion"; not so much a "comedian, as a company." He says, they should have been preserved in a "Munden gallery."[1]

Lamb had a sensitive ear for melody. He distinguished the stately declamation of Kemble in Shakespearian role; the triumphant note of Bensley in Iago; Dicky Suett's "O La!" which was "richer than a cuckoo." In Mrs. Jordan's acting he detected the coarseness of her voice as compared with her early days when it "sank into the heart." He distinguished Jack Palmer's two voices "both plausible, hypocritical and insinuating, his secondary or supplemental voice still more decisively histronic than his common one"; and Dowton's "childish treble" still piped in his ears.

Some of these criticisms of actors are in fact criticisms of life. In them Lamb reflects his own high ideals. He says of Mrs. Jordan's Giovanni that "she has taken the sting from the evil thing."[2] While he supported Congreve's and Wycherley's plays, yet he never left any doubt of his attitude toward morality, for he says "translated into real life" the characters of these plays are "profligates and strumpets." He loved Jack Bannister off the stage for his sweet good natured pretensions, and when he played the Children of the Wood Lamb's "whole conscience" was stirred. He declared Miss Kelly's Yarico was "one of the most afflicting lessons of the yearnings of the human heart and its mistakes that was ever read upon the stage."[2]

But for an actor to be great he must have not only high

[1]"On the Acting of Munden."
[2]"Theatrical Criticisms."

ideals but poetic imagination. Lamb loved the gymnastics of the imagination that Munden aroused when he played in the Cobbler of Preston, and kept "the brain of the spectator in as wild a ferment as if some Arabian Night were being acted before him."[1] He declared, "a table or a joint stool in his conception rises into a dignity equivalent to Cassiopeia's Chair" and "a tub of butter contemplated by him amounts to a Platonic idea."[2]

But a play however great may be leveled to mediocrity by lack of judgment and intelligence on the part of the player. Lamb's idea of acting was "to hold the mirror up to nature." The actor must distinguish the difference between a man pushed to the extremity, and a wild tiger. A bloody character is not necessarily a monster. He objected to Cook's caricature of Richard III, which represented him as a bloody monster, and failed to impress the audience with "the awe and deep admiration of his witty parts, his consummate hypocrisy, and indefatigable prosecution of purpose."[3]

Lamb's ideas of artistic acting are summed up in his discussion of three favorites: Bensley, Dicky Suett, and Miss Kelly. He states in the essay "On Some of the Old Actors" that, "of all the actors who flourished in my time Bensley had the greatest swell of soul. . . He had the true poetical enthusiasm, the rarest faculty among players . . . His voice had the dissonance and at times the inspiriting effect of the trumpet. His gait was uncouth and stiff, but in no way embarrassed by affectation; and the thoroughbred gentleman was uppermost in every movement. He seized

[1]"Acting of Munden."
[2]Ibid.
[3]Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb,"Letters". Vol. 1, p.43.

the moment of passion with greatest truth; like a faithful clock, never striking before the time . . . He was totally destitute of trick or artifice." Bensley seemed to reach this high ideal of impersonation in the characters of Hotspur, Iago, and Malvolio. His Hotspur showed a "fine madness"; his Iago was "a consummate villain entrapping a noble nature"; and his Malvolio was not a ludicrous fool but a cold, austere, repelling but dignified Puritan, "comic but by accident."

Dicky Suett was the ideal clown. There was a daintiness about him that Lamb admired. "He was the Robin Goodfellow of the stage. He came in to trouble all things with a welcomed perplexity. He was known like Puck, by his note -- Ha! Ha! Ha! sometimes deepening to Ho! Ho! Ho! with an irresistible accession of O La! . . . Care, that troubles all the world was forgotten in his composition. Had he had but two grains (nay, half a grain) of it, he could never have supported himself upon those two spider's strings, which served him as legs. A doubt or a scruple must have made him totter, a sigh have puffed him down; the weight of a frown had staggered him, a wrinkle made him lose his balance. But on he went scrambling upon those airy stilts of his with Robin Goodfellow. . . Shakespeare foresaw him when he framed his fools and jesters. They have all the Suett Stamp, a loose shambling gait, a slippery tongue, this last the ready midwife to a without-pain-delivered jest, in words, light as air; with idlest rhymes tagging conceit when busiest, singing with Lear in tempest, or Sir Toby at the buttery-hatch . . . Dicky seemed like a thing, as Shakespeare says of Love, too young to know what conscience is. Evil fled from him, not as from an antagonist but because it could not touch him any more than a cannon ball a

fly."[1]

Lamb was accused of flattering Miss Kelly on her acting. He says when she played the part of a brother of seventeen she made "the prettiest unalarming Platonic approaches, without going too far." She put so much "good sense and intelligence into every part." Her Yarico was "the most intense piece of acting, and the most heart-rending spectacle," he had ever witnessed and it was due to nothing more than her "wonderful imagination."[2] But it was, as Rachel, in Richard Brome's Jovial Crew that she won his heart. "She was Princess of Mumpers and Lady Paramount, with her gabbling lachrymose petitions; her tones such as we have heard by the side of old woods when an irresistible face has come peeping on one of a sudden; with her full black locks, and a voice -- how shall we describe it? a voice that was by nature meant to convey nothing but truth and goodness but warped by circumstance into an assurance that she is telling us a lie, that catching twitch of her thievish irreprovable finger -- those ballad singer notes, so vulgar, yet so unvulgar; that assurance so like impudence, and yet so many countless leagues removed from it; her jeers which we had rather stand than be caressed with other ladies' compliments a summer's day long - her face with a wild out-of-doors grace upon it . . . What a lass that were," he says, "to go gypsying through the world with." Miss Kelly's acting illustrates Lamb's ideal of illusion in comedy characters. As a spectator how did Lamb respond to these artists of the stage?

[1]"On Some of the Old Actors."
[2]"Theatrical Criticisms."

He lived the scenes in his imagination as he did in his first play, but now with a keen insight of human nature. At times he was unable to throw off the illusion after leaving the theater. Miss Kelly as Rachel stirred his passion of love, and he sent her a letter of proposal the following day. Dowton shook his ribs "most incontinently," and his lungs "crowed chanticleer." Dodd cleared his cloudy face of its furrows." He enjoyed Bensley's illusion in Malvolio and "did not wish that it whould be removed."[1] Lamb had "no room for laughter," for his deep sense of pity was stirred by the "infirmity of man's nature." Munden's Cockletop "stuck" by him in "a manner as to threaten sleep,"[2] and no sooner had he fallen into slumber than five hundred of Munden's faces were dancing before him.

II

Lamb's criticism of plays represents him in another relation to the stage. The Specimens established his reputation as a critic. This collection was the result of his searching in the British Museum, for the old manuscripts of the early dramatists, including those from the middle of Queen Elizabeth's reign to the close of the reign of Charles I. What was this antiquarian seeking in these old plays? He says the purpose of the Specimens was "to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors. To shew in what manner they felt, when they placed themselves by the

[1] "Some of the Old Actors."
[2] "On the Acting of Munden."

power of imagination in trying circumstances, in the conflicts of duty and passion, or the strife of contending duties; how their griefs were tempered, and their full-swoln joys abated; how much of Shakespeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind."[1] In searching to find what were the emotions and imaginations of man, Lamb was playing his part in the romantic movement, "return to nature." Since the plays of Lamb's period had degenerated in vigor of passion and imagination in which Lamb delighted, he sought these human elements of a great soul in the old dramas. His Specimens called attention to the excellent features of these plays, and were of value to the stage in awakening not only a new interest in these old poets, but in giving new inspiration to the dramatists for a truer representation of life.

The plays that treated of human life and manners were chosen rather than the artificial plays. He selected "scenes of passion, sometimes of deepest quality, interesting situations, serious descriptions, that which is more allied to poetry than to wit, and to tragic rather than to common poetry."[2]

The passions chosen are various. The more terrible the scene the more fascinated is the critic. The fear of death is represented by the "growing horrors of Faustus" when the hours and half hours "bring him nearer to the enactment of his dire compact." He points out the skill and dignity of the horrors which John Webster presents in the Duchess of Malfi and enumerates the terrors

[1] "Characters of Dramatic Writers Contemporary with Shakespeare."
[2] Ibid.

which the Duchess passed through before her death sentence. He refers to the wild, and terrible scene in Ford's Broken Heart in which Calantha showed more fortitude than the Spartan lad who let the beast gnaw out his bowels without a groan. He could not find comparisons sublime enough for this grand catastrophe and he says, "It almost bears us in imagination to Calvary and the Cross." Another heroic character that he greatly admires is Fletcher's Ordella, whom he pronounces "a piece of sainted nature," because "she offers her life as a sacrifice that the king of France may not be childless." Yet he criticises Fletcher for his unnatural and violent situations. Lamb refers to a character in Decker's Honest Whore which would shock the audience of his time, but he maintains that "where Bellafont, a reclaimed harlot, recounts some of the miseries of her profession, a simple picture of honor and shame contrasted without violence and expressed without immodesty is worth all the strong lines against the harlot's profession."

In Decker's Old Fortunatus he finds Orleans to be a second Romeo, "only less poetical and a little madder." The Merry Devil of Edmonton he says, is intended to make the reader happy, and nothing is finer, more gentleman-like and nobler than the conversation of the young men.

Lamb's poetic taste was gratified by the dialogue of these old masters. He refers to the bold allegory of Marston's Antonio and Mellida; to the reality and life in the dialogue of Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy. It passes any scenical illusion he ever felt. The words of Vindici and Hippolito to their mother are "more keen and dagger-like than those which Hamlet speaks to his mother."

He is delighted with the poetical fancy and elegance of the mind of Ben Jonson in the Poetaster in which he "has revived the whole court of Augustus." Lamb's imagination finds play in the "torrent of images," which overcomes the judgment. "The assemblage of them all produces a result equal to the grandest poetry." He fancies the grace and charm with which Beaumont and Fletcher mask women as pages to follow unfaithful lovers.

Throughout the Specimens he measures characters, scenes, poetry, and dialogue with those of Shakespeare's plays. Heywood is a "sort of prose Shakespeare"; Beaumont and Fletcher were but "an inferior sort of Shakespeare"; the full and heightened style of the descriptive and didactic passages of Chapman "approaches nearest Shakespeare"; Marlowe's Edward II is compared with Richard II, and his Jew of Malta with the Merchant of Venice: but his master does not raise ideal female characters higher than Lord Brooke's Caelica and Camena; and Tourneur's dialogue is more dagger like than Hamlet's.

But the comparison of Middleton's witches with those in Macbeth is perhaps the finest, as it shows Lamb's poetic imagination and keen discrimination. He says that the witches of Shakespeare "are distinguished from the witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman, plotting dire mischief, might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first meet with Macbeth's he is spell-bound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These witches can hurt the body, those have power over the soul. Hecate in Middleton has a son, a low buffoon; the hags of

Shakespeare have neither child of their own, nor seem to be descended from any parent . . . As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They came with thunder and lightning and vanish to airy music . . . Except Hecate, they have no names, which heightens their mysteriousness. The names and some of the properties, which the other author has given his hags excite smiles. The Weird Sisters are serious things; their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But, in a lesser degree, the witches of Middleton are fine creations. Their power too, is in some measure over the mind. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, like a thick scurf over life."

Throughout the Specimens Lamb points out the poetical excellencies, giving particular stress to the heroic characters of tragedy. He shows most interest in those scenes which lay bare the human soul. The scenes of greatest horror reach the greatest sublimity which recalls Calvary. He responds to the plays in a manner similar to the theater. His heart throbs in sympathy. At times his "ears tingle," his cheeks flush" and his "eyes gush tears of delight."

III

Perhaps the most interesting and artistic of the dramatic essays is "Tragedies of Shakespeare" considered with reference to their fitness for the stage. Lamb has interpreted the greatness of the mind and soul of Shakespeare. He thinks no actor can portray objectively the wonderful conception of Shakespeare's imagination. Only the imagination can conceive the Othello, Hamlet, Lear, and

Macbeth of Shakespeare, since they are representatives not of physical action, but of mind and soul undergoing great passions. We are not to believe that Lamb objected to the acting of Shakespeare's plays, since he expresses so much pleasure in the theater. What was his purpose then in writing this essay?

He seems to have a threefold purpose in mind, which he presents in a paradoxical fashion. First, he expresses an unfriendly feeling toward Garrick, who, in the eighteenth century had revived an interest in the acting of Shakespeare's plays. This feeling was partly due to an epitaph he saw in the Abbey, which aroused jealousy. The epitaph contained this line: "Shakespeare and Garrick like twin stars shall shine." Lamb never had sat under the spell of Garrick's acting, and his enmity was aroused that an actor should be placed on a level with his master. Lamb considered the power to create poetical images and conceptions far surpassed the power to recite the same when put into words, and there Shakespeare in nobility of mind and soul was far superior to Garrick. But Lamb's ire was aroused even more by the marring of Shakespeare's plays by Tate and Cibber, in which Garrick connived by using their acting editions. Lamb says, "I am almost disposed to deny Garrick the merits of being an admirer of Shakespeare. A true lover of his excellencies he certainly was not, for would any true lover of them have admitted into his matchless scenes such ribald trash . . . I believe it impossible that he could have had a proper reverence for Shakespeare, and have condescended to go through that interpolated scene in <u>Richard the Third</u>, in which Richard tries to break his wife's heart by telling her he loves another woman and says.

'If she survives this she is immortal.' Yet I doubt not that he delivered this vulgar stuff with as much anxiety of emphasis as any of the genuine parts; and for acting, it is as well calculated as any." He was particularly enraged that King Lear should have been so marred by a happy ending, "as if at his years, and with his experience, anything was left but to die!"

Another aim in this essay is to show the subjective side of the tragical characters. "There is so much in them which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye and tone and gesture have nothing to do." For instance, the anger of a vulgar character and of Othello might be portrayed by expression of countenance and action which were very similar, while the motives were very dissimilar. The struggle in the mind of Othello which is the great tragic struggle can not be portrayed.

Lamb does not argue that Hamlet should not be acted, but he wishes to show how Hamlet is made another thing by being acted. "Nine parts in ten of what Hamlet does, are transactions between himself and his moral sense," which is not to be represented objectively. Most actors in their efforts to show Hamlet's state of mind toward his mother and Ophelia rant in a mad way which quite destroys the princely conception of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Again the objective representation of the character may quite destroy the ideal side because of our race prejudices and customs. The audience shudders when the black Othello loves Desdemona. It is repulsive. The nobility of his mind is quite forgotten. The same is true in King Lear. The sight of a tottering old man turned out in the storm has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting . . . The greatness of Lear is not in corporeal dimensions, but in

intellectual. It is his mind which is laid bare. . . What has voice or eye to do with such things?"

If some of the princely conceptions of Shakespeare's imagination, which belong to the natural world, cannot be fully portrayed on the stage, how much more does the acting fall short, in an effort to portray creatures of the unreal world, as ghosts, spirits and fairies. They are creatures too ethereal for material form, and their proper realm is in the imagination only. Thus Lamb aims to show that the characters of Shakespeare have a subjective side which only the imagination can conceive, and it is this great intelligence and spirituality of his characters which make his plays superior.

As a third aim in his essay he shows the lack of intellect in the audience. He says, "The more coarse and palpable the passion is, the more hold upon the eyes and ears of the spectators the performer obviously possesses." He further states that they do not see the difference between the characters of George Barnwell who was a murderer and Othello. "They say that both are natural, but the odds are that ninety-nine out of a hundred would willingly behold the same catastrophe happen to both heroes and have thought the rope more due to Othello than Barnwell. For the texture of Othello's mind . . . its heroic confidences and its human misgivings, its agonies of hate springing from the depths of love, they see no more than the spectators at a cheaper rate, who pay their pennies apiece, to look through the man's telescope in Leicester Fields, see into the inward plot and topography of the moon." He shows that the audience has no conception of the greatness of a heroic and tragic character. The essay, then, has

expressed Lamb's attitude toward Garrick; has shown the subjective side of Shakespeare's tragical character; and has revealed the lack of dramatic sense of the spectators; but it has not argued that Shakespeare's plays should not be acted.

IV

Perhaps the essay on the "Artificial Comedy of the Last Century" aroused more adverse criticism of Lamb than any other of his productions. This essay is another illustration of the influence of illusion upon his criticism. Lamb was severely criticised for upholding the plays of Congreve and Wycherley. This essay does not indicate a moral degeneration of the critic, for his principle of illusion puts the characters of these plays in a different world; they were not of "Christendom" but of "the land of cuckoldry." They were not to be judged by the law courts of real people. From the standpoint of poetical justice, Lamb argues, that no good person suffers on the stage, because the author "has spread a privation of moral light over his creation." He says that if translated into real life they are "profligates and strumpets" and would reduce things to "chaos." However Lamb seems to forget that they did represent the life of the Restoration period, and as such were real people.

But this essay is another illustration of Lamb's paradoxical and whimsical style of writing. Lamb's romantic nature rebelled against the restraint of the audience which demanded morals in a play. They were satisfied with puerile plays, the repent-and-forgive type where the moral point was everything. He was cross at

the audience for demanding realistic life rather than fictitious personages. In the School for Scandal they desired Joseph Surface to be a real villain, while Lamb upheld Jack Palmer's acting, a sort of hypocritical assumption of hypocrisy. "Jack Palmer was twice an actor in this exquisite part." He was playing to the audience all the while he was playing upon Sir Peter and his lady.

This essay shows Lamb's tendency to be perverse at times. He enjoys taking the contrary side from that of general opinion. As Hazlitt says of the Occult school, "They discern no beauties but that are concealed from superficial eyes, and overlook all that are obvious to the vulgar part of mankind. By happy alchemy of mind they convert dross into gold."[1] Lamb seems to be hunting for good in an evil thing. He has come under the influence of the sentimental school which finds good in all humanity. He comes to the aid of the censured writers, in the spirit of his father when he maintained the cause of the oppressed regardless of the number of his opponents. He does all this in his whimsical way, basing his argument on his principle of illusion.

Perhaps Lamb is not a great critic in the broadest sense of the term, but he has shown great genius and has won favor with critics. Saintsbury says, "It may be doubted whether such a critic as Lamb though infinitely delightful is exactly 'great' because of the singular gaps and arbitrariness of his likes and dislikes."[2]

[1]Hazlitt, Table Talk. p.225.
[2]History of Criticism. Vol. 1, p.496.

Hazlitt speaks of the Occult school "whose members have a natural proneness to singularity, a love of what is odd. They like a monopoly of taste and are shocked at the prostitution of intellect in popular productions. They would tolerate the sweetness of an actress's voice only for the ugliness of her face. Nothing goes down with them but what is caviare to the public . . . Yet they smack of genius and would be worth any money were it only for the rarity of the thing."[1] Brander Matthews says, "It is difficult for any one who has had to read much of the writings of other dramatic critics to speak of Lamb's essays on theatrical subjects without falling into extravagance of eulogy."[2] Swinburne states, "When he took on him to grapple in spirit with Shakespeare and his followers, he shewed himself the strongest as well as the finest critic that ever was found worthy to comment on the most masculine or leonine school of poets in all the range of English literature."[3] Ainger says, "He was too fond of paradox, too much at the mercy of his emotions, or the mood of the hour to be a safe guide always. But where no disturbing forces interfered, he exercised a faculty almost unique in the history of criticism."[4] It is seen that the critics agree that Lamb has genius in dramatic criticism, but that he is capricious in style, and too much influenced by his likes and dislikes.

Lamb's genius of criticism is due not so much to its extent as to its forcefulness, yet his criticisms on acting make a valuable handbook for the actor, and his interpretations illuminate

[1] Hazlitt, Table Talk. p.225.
[2] Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb. p.12.
[3] Nineteenth Century, January 1885.
[4] Ainger, English Men of Letters. Vol. 5, p.185.

the text for the student, while his Specimens form a guide for the dramatist.

The delightful note of his criticism is due to his sense of humor, and this together with his vivid imagination and power of concrete expression make his writing forceful, as he flashes upon our imagination the wonderful scenes of his beloved poets. He spent so many hours with these old Elizabethan dramatists, that the scenes did not merely pass before his mind but they electrified his innermost life. These scenes were the "old familiar faces" that he loved. What he loved stirred his imagination, and in turn, his imagination ennobled his love; therefore he elevates the scene according to the thermometer of his emotions. Sometimes he exaggerates the dramatic greatness of the character or scene.

His "will-worship" exaggerates, but his perverse ways sometimes bias his judgment against excellent dramatic work. He says, "Goethe's Faust is inferior to Marlowe's in the chief motive of the plot and lets the criticism rest there."[1] As a critic his paradoxical style is unique, and it makes one seek beneath the surface for the real meaning.

His criticisms indicate his romantic nature. His antiquarian tendency is shown in his love for old literature; and his "return to nature" may be noted in his seeking to learn the emotion of man when in trying situations; his wonderful imagination and fancy is seen in his attitude toward illusion on the stage; and his emotion is portrayed by his response to dramatic scenes. As an impressionist, he is a romantic critic; he dares to express what he likes with no other authority than his own sensibility.

[1]Ainger, English Men of Letters. Vol. 5, p.184.

CHAPTER THREE

LAMB AS A DRAMATIST

The period in which a dramatist lives has much to do with his success. We find in Lamb's time that the drama was at low ebb, having been on the decline since the Elizabethan period. During the reign of the Puritans the stage had been tabooed, but after the ban was lifted in the Restoration period, the artificial comedy, which reflected the lowest tide of English morality, was produced. The artificial comedy was followed by the sentimental drama of the eighteenth century. It seemed that the public desired either a love story like Richardson's Pamela in the form of an opera, presenting idealized lovers and humorous characters of rustic simplicity, or, a comedy of social and domestic life which had a sentimental plot with a good deal of action and some mystery, and one prominent comic figure.[1]

Lamb's natural poetical ability and his love for the theater stimulated his ambition to become a dramatist, since he could not be an actor. Shortly after the tragedy in his family he began writing his first play called Pride's Cure, but later changed to John Woodvil. After submitting it to Coleridge and Southey, who tried to dissuade him from publishing it, he sent the play to John Kemble, who offered to put it in the hands of the proprietor of Drury Lane Theater. After waiting a year for a reply, he wrote to

[1] Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility. p.223.

Kemble to know the result. Lamb in a letter to Manning writes, "At last I have written to Kemble to know the event of my play which was presented last Christmas. As I suspected came an answer back that the copy was lost, and could not be found, no hint that anybody had to this day looked into it, with a courteous request of another copy (if I had one by me) and a promise of a definitive answer in a week. I could not resist so facile and moderate a demand, so scribbled out another, omitting sundry things . . . I sent it last night, and am in weekly expectation of the tolling bell and death warrant."[1] The play was soon returned as unsuitable for the theater. In 1802 Lamb printed the play at his own expense of £25.

I

John Woodvil is a tragedy in five acts, written in the Shakespearian style of alternate prose and blank verse. The setting is in the period immediately after the Restoration, when puritanical restraint being removed, society became drunk and English morality was at its lowest ebb.

The hero of the play is the elder son of a puritan, Sir Walter Woodvil, who has been so deeply engaged in the revolution against the crown that he has not been pardoned under the Oblivion Act. Sir Walter and his younger son Simon disguised as Frenchmen are living in the Forest of Sherwood. The elder son John has remained a royalist, not because of principle, since he was indifferent alike to Cromwell and Charles I, but because he is ambitious to

[1]Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb, Letters. Chap. 1, p.221.

become great in political life. He remains in Woodvil Hall surrounded by a set of cavalier friends and hangers-on who spend their time drinking toasts to the King, in merrymaking, and in feeding on the estate like so many parasites. Some of the company insult Margaret, a ward of Sir Walter, and with womanly indignation against such procedure in Woodvil Hall, and with bitter feelings toward John who has neglected her, she disguises herself as a boy and joins Sir Walter and Simon in the Forest of Sherwood. After her departure John, who has been her lover since boyhood, makes a show of grief for the moment. On the King's birthday he and his comrades are celebrating the event in excessive drinking. John under the influence of wine discloses to Lovell, a false friend, the hiding place of his father. Lovell and Gray, another false friend, proceed at once to Sherwood Forest to arrest Sir Walter as a traitor. Arriving at the hiding place they make known their errand. Simon draws his sword, but the father is so overcome by grief because of his son's betrayal, that he dies. After his burial Simon travels, but Margaret returns to Woodvil Hall to comfort John, who has dismissed his rioting companions and spends his time in grieving over his mistake. Margaret consoles him; their love is renewed; and after some time in prayer, he feels that his sin is expiated.

When the play was published, it was ridiculed. The magazines were not sparing in their criticisms. The Edinburgh Review made heavy fun of it, and The Annual Review turned it to ridicule, ending a contemptuous criticism with, "What precious nonsense! but this is a specimen of that canting, whining style, or rather slang of poetry, which is now-a-days offered to us as the very essence of

simplicity and pathos!"[1] Blackwood's Magazine gave the following criticism: "It is a tame imitation of the manner of the old dramatists -- of their manner when engaged in their subordinate and preparatory scenes. For there is an attempt at tragic passion. We read the piece asking ourselves when the play is to begin, and while still asking the question find ourselves at the conclusion."[2] Wordsworth however wrote, "I like your play marvelously, having no objection to it but one . . . I mean a little degradation of character for a more dramatic turn of the plot."[3] Hazlitt says, "There is much that is exquisite both in sentiment and expression."[4] De Quincey said, "I had felt and acknowledged a delicacy and tenderness in the situation as well as the sentiments, but disfigured as I thought by quaint, grotesque, and mimetic phraseology."[4] These criticisms call attention to the pathos and poetical beauty of the dialogue, and its defects of vulgarity and "antiquity."

In answer to Southey's criticism, and objection to printing the play, Lamb writes, "You object to my pauses being at the end of my lines. I do not know any great difficulty I should find in diversifying or changing my blank verse; but I go upon the model of Shakespeare in my play, and endeavor after a colloquial ease and spirit, something like him . . . I love to anticipate charges of unoriginality; the first line is almost Shakespeare's:

"To have my love to bed and to rise"
Midsummer Night's Dream

[1] Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb. Vol. 1, p.226.
[2] Living Age, September 15, 1849.
[3] William C. Hazlitt, "Eliana," Atlantic Monthly, February 1906.
[4] Allibone, Dictionary of Authors. Vol. 1, p.1049.
[5] Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb, Letters. Vol. 1, p.159.

I think there is a sweetness in the versification not unlike some rhymes in that exquisite play." In another letter to Southey he says, "My tragedy will be a medley (as I intend it to be a medley) of laughter and tears, prose and verse, and in some places rhyme, songs, wit, pathos, humour, and, if possible, sublimity; at least it is not a fault in my intention if it does not comprehend most of these discordant atoms. Heaven send they dance not the 'Dance of Death'!"

After reading John Woodvil the first time, I felt disappointed, as I was expecting to find an illustration of Lamb's dramatic ideas, as set forth in the Specimens. I, too, found myself at the close of the play and discovered no dramatic action, or vigor of passion that Lamb discussed in his criticisms. Instead, he seemed to be imitating the very thing he condemned in the modern repent-and-forgive play.

The construction and characterization are weak. (Only once does Lamb refer to the construction of the drama in his Specimens.[1]) There is no motive for action, the hero becomes intoxicated, and without any temptation whatever, discloses the hiding place of his father. Had he been tempted by either love or political ambition and wavered between one of them and his filial duty, we should have had dramatic action. There is no suspense, no rise or fall of action, and the incidents are not interwoven. We do not know when the curtain falls, upon what scene it will rise. In the fourth act John gives a few lines in soliloquy; then we are

[1]The Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, "Fletcher."

hurried to Sherwood to see the arrest of Sir Walter; then to another part of the forest to hear what Margaret has to say; then back to Woodvil Hall again. The play is more like a closet drama, than one for the stage.

John Woodvil is "a medley," especially in the dialogue. It is shot through and through with Shakespearian phrases, so that in reading, one is constantly diverted from the thread of the story by locating these phrases in their native place. Let us compare some of these borrowed phrases in John Woodvil with the speeches in Shakespeare's plays. Compare a commendation in this play with one in The Merchant of Venice.

"MARTIN: Well spoken, Daniel! O rare Daniel!
-- his oaths and his politics! excellent!"[1]

"SHYLOCK: A Daniel come to judgment! Yea, a Daniel!
. . . . .
O noble judge! O excellent young man!"[2]

John's speech on confidence is parallel with Hamlet's speech on the reason of man.

"JOHN: How fine and noble a thing is confidence!
How reasonable too, and almost godlike!"[3]

"HAMLET: What a piece of work is man! How noble
in reason! . . . In action how like
an angel! In apprehension how like a god!"[4]

The expression "Men die but once" recalls Julius Caesar's words, "The valiant never taste of death but once,"[5] and "I would be

[1]
[2]Act 1.
[3]The Merchant of Venice, Act 4, sc. 1.
[4]Act 3.
[5]Hamlet, Act 2, sc. 2.
Act 2, sc. 2.

great" is probably suggested by Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in which she says, "Thou wouldst be great."[1]

There are other imitations of Shakespeare than these phrases. Sometimes whole speeches are modelled on Shakespeare's. There is a resemblance of the complaints of Margaret to those of Portia in Julius Caesar. Margaret complains of John's altered manner, his neglect, and refers to his former vows of love, and to her own pride. Both speeches are in the same mood, and the verse is similar. Another example of this imitation is the speech of Sanford, scolding and threatening the servants of Woodvil Hall, which is parallel with Malvolio's reprimanding the carousal of Sir Toby and Aguecheek. In loyalty and dignity the stewards resemble each other, yet the content and verse form of Sanford's speech recalls, also, Marullus' reprimand[2] to the Commoners.

The greatest worth of the play lies in the isolated passages which are almost Shakespearean in poetic beauty. Godwin mistook the following passage for one of the beauties of the Old Dramatists and asked Lamb to help him locate the author.

> "To see the sun to bed and to rise,
> Like some hot amorist with glowing eyes,
> Bursting the lazy bands of sleep that bound him,
> With all his fires and travelling glories round him:
> Sometimes the moon on soft night clouds to rest,
> Like beauty nestling in a young man's breast,
> And all the winking stars, her handmaids keep
> Admiring silence, while those lovers sleep:" [3]

But much of his verse form is harsh and jangling as,

[1] Macbeth, Act 1, sc. 1.
[2] Julius Caesar, Act 1, sc. 1.
[3] Act 2.

"This Lovel here's of a tough honesty,
Would put the rack to the proof. He is not of that sort
Which haunt my house, snorting the liquors,
And, when their wisdoms are afloat with wine,
Spend vows as fast as vapours, which go off,
Even with the fumes, their fathers."[1]

The following Shakespearian devices may be noted: the play opens with music and a comment upon it by the first speaker as in Twelfth Night; one scene opens with the reading of a letter, followed by a comment on the writer which has a parallel in Macbeth; the simple life enjoyed by Sir Walter in the Forest of Sherwood resembles the life of the Duke in the Forest of Arden in As You Like It; and Margaret's disguising as a boy and fleeing to Sherwood is an imitation of the adventure of Rosalind in the same play.

Lamb shows the influence not only of Shakespeare but of Beaumont and Fletcher as well.[2] Lamb speaks of them as his "first love" and remarks, "From what I was so freshly conversant in, what wonder if my language took a tinge."[2] A resemblance to Beaumont and Fletcher may be noted in the vulgar dialogue and drunkenness of the characters. In Beaumont's The Scornful Lady, the younger Loveless in confederation with his boon companions squanders his elder brother's estate while he is away, and in The Coxcomb Ricardo's shame for his drunken mistake when he neglected his lady-love is akin to John's remorse for neglecting Margaret and betraying his father.

Lamb is not only influenced by the old dramatists but he

[1] Act 3.
[2] Dircks, Plays and Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb. p. X.

shows the marks of his own age. His play is romantic after the fashion not of the Old Dramatists but of the German melodramas. "It is not difficult to trace the influence of Kotzebue; the piece belongs clearly to the time when plays of The Stranger type found appreciative audiences."[1]

Let us next note the romantic characteristics of John Woodvil. The play lacks the impersonal style of Shakespeare because Lamb is subjective and writes himself in his plays. One cannot read the play without being reminded of the author again and again. He frequently uses his coined epithets as "not-to-be-endured tribute" and "Resist-the-devil-and-he-will-flee-from-thee Pureman." The following speech recalls Lamb's love for art, "You shall go with me into the gallery where I will show you the Vandyke I have purchased"[2] Again John's hospitality toward his friends, and the effect of wine on his imagination and speech remind one of Lamb. Margaret's sympathy for John, because in a state of intoxication he betrayed his father, recalls Charles Lamb's sympathy for his sister. John's love of emotion is akin to that of the author.

A second dramatic feature is the strange combination resulting from an imitation of an Elizabethan drama set in the period of the Restoration. Other features are the expression of the love of nature and simple life in the Forest of Sherwood, and the sentimental feeling for animals, Simon expresses his love for,

> "All things that live,
> From the crooked worm to man's imperial form
> And God-resembling likeness."[3]

[1]Dircks, Plays and Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb, Introduction, p. XI.
[2]Act 1. [3]Act 2.

The hero himself is a romanticist. He is under no restraint in his epicurean habits. He is given to levity, wine, and caprice and "spends too much time in riotous living, graceless society, and mirth unpalatable," yet he has the confidence of his father and brother in his "honor and fidelity." He has excessive pride and ambition to be great, if we judge from his own remarks. He possesses artistic temperament and values highly, the imagination of a poet. It is "an internal wine, richer than Lippara or Canaries, yet uncrushed from any grapes of earth, unpressed in mortal wine presses. . . It is denominated indifferently wit, conceit, invention, inspiration; but its most royal and comprehensive name is fancy."[1] He enjoys emotion and seeks it in excessive drinking, for he exclaims to his companions, "more mirth I beseech you, gentlemen, . . . every man must commit his twenty bumpers first. We are not yet well roused . . . Another round, and then let every man devise what trick he can in his fancy, for better manifesting our loyalty this day." Then occurs the following conversation and action.

"THIRD GENTLEMAN: Who shall pledge me in a pint bumper, while we drink the king's health upon our knees?

LOVEL: Why on our knees, cavalier?

JOHN: (smiling) For more devotion, to be sure. Sirrah, fetch the gilt goblets.

(They drink the king's health kneeling.)

LOVEL: (aside) Vanity and gay thoughts of wine do meet in him, and engender madness.

(While the rest are engaged in a wild kind of talk, John advances to the front of the stage and soliloguizes.)

[1]Act 3.

JOHN: My spirits turn to fire, they mount so fast
My joys are turbulent, my hopes show like fruition.
These high and gusty relishes of life, sure,
Have no allayings of mortality in them.
I am too hot now and o'er capable,
For the tedious processes,and creeping wisdom,
Of human acts, and enterprises of a man.
I want some seasonings of adversity,
Some strokes of the old mortifier, calamity,
To take these swellings down,divines call vanity."[1]

Woodvil is romantic in his enjoyment of grief. It does not possess him so much, as he entertains and cherishes it. His mind is turned inward witnessing his own emotions and he discusses them as he handles his mourning.

"How beautiful
And comely do these mourning garments show!
Sure grief hath set his sacred impress here,
To claim the worlds respect! they note so feelingly
By outward types the serious man within.
Alas! What part or portion can I claim
In all the decencies of virtuous sorrow,
Which other mourners use?"[2]

In the following quotation we see not so much a man grieving over his mistakes, as analyzing his own condition and pitying himself:

"I have no part in any good man's love,
In all earth's pleasures have I none,
I fade and wither in my own esteem,
This earth holds not alive so poor a thing as I am."[3]

Again we find the romantic hero indulging in a flood of tears.

"And then I at my own presumption smiled,
And then I wept that I should smile at all,
Having such cause of grief! I wept outright,
Tears like a river, flooded all my face."[4]

[1]Act 3. [3]Ibid.
[2]Act 5. [4]Ibid.

His freedom from restraint, his subjective mind, his love of the imagination and emotions are the chief romantic characteristics of the hero.

Lamb's play failed because it was "a medley." He gathered together materials but he could not properly order them in the plot of a drama. He could not link incident with incident to create surprise. He could not motivate his play to produce dramatic action, nor delineate character.

The play is "a medley" in that it shows the influence of the period in its melodramatic tone; the influence of Beaumont and Fletcher in the drunken scenes; and the influence of the style of Shakespeare. It is a weak imitation of Shakespeare in form which is prose and blank verse; a part of the verse, however, is hardly different in matter and style from prose. He has borrowed many phrases, and imitated the dialogue, characters, and scenes. Lamb has given his attention to the accessories which are valuable in a drama, but he has failed to imitate the most essential parts, delineation of character and plot.

II

Lamb's first failure did not destroy all hope for success as a dramatist. His second attempt was a farce entitled Mr. H., consisting of two acts and a prologue. Lamb spent about six months in its composition, as he only wrote when in the mood. The play was submitted to Wroughton, manager of Drury Lane, in February 1806. On June 9, Lamb wrote begging to know if his piece had any chance so that he might make alterations. He received a

reply that it had been accepted and would be sent for alterations in a few days. Lamb was jubilant. He wrote to Wordsworth expressing a childish joy over his success. He wrote to Manning, "The rehearsals have gone on privately, lest by many folks knowing it, the story should come out, which would infallibly damn it . . . I had no idea it was so forward. I have had no trouble, attending no reading or rehearsal. What a contrast to the usual parade of authors! . . . The title is Mr. H no more. A great H, sprawling over the playbill and attracting eyes at every corner." The plot is related by Lamb in the same letter. "The story is a coxcomb appearing at Bath, vastly rich -- all the ladies dying for him -- all bursting to know who he is; but he goes on by no other name than Mr. H -- a curiosity like that of the dames of Strasburg about the man with the great nose. But I won't tell you more about it. Yes, I will; but I can't give you an idea of how I have done it. I'll just tell you that after much vehement admiration, when his true name comes out, 'Hogsflesh' all the women shun him, and not one can be found to change their name for him."[1] The play however does not end so disastrously for the hero, as he receives permission from the king to change his name from Hogsflesh to Bacon. With this new appellation he receives the promise of Melisanda, a rich young heiress, to wed him.

The play was acted December 10, 1806, at Drury Lane Theater, Mr. Elliston taking the title role. The house was crowded to the ceiling, many friends of the author being present. There was great expectation, for Lamb's wit was not unknown. The audience

[1]Ainger, The Letters of Charles Lamb. Vol. 1, p.140.

waited impatiently to the close of the long opera, which preceded Mr. H. At last Mr. Elliston entered and gave the prologue, which was greatly applauded, even Lamb himself entering in the applause. The substance of the prologue concerned the various uses of initials instead of names. The first part of the play was well received, but on the disclosure of the name, the audience was displeased and hissed. The farce went on amid shouts of "hear! hear!" and "off! off!" Lamb himself, says Crabb Robinson,[1] who was in the pit with him and Mary, joined in the hissing! Lamb's fears were realized, he heard "the tolling of the bell"!

The next day Lamb wrote to Wordsworth the following: "Mr. H came out last night and failed. I had my fears; the subject was not substantial enough. John Bull must have solider fare than a letter. We are pretty stout about it; have had plenty of condoling friends, but after all we had rather it should have succeeded. You will see the prologue in most of the morning papers. It was received with such shouts, as I never witnessed to a prologue. It was attempted to be encored. How hard! a thing I did merely as a task, because it was wanted, and set no great store by; and Mr. H.!! The number of friends we had in the house . . . was astonishing, but they yielded at length to a few hisses! A hundred hisses! (Damn the word, I write it, like kisses -- how different) a hundred hisses outweigh a thousand claps. The former came more directly from the heart. Well, 'tis withdrawn and there is an end."[2]

[1] Diary. Vol. 1, p.230.
[2] Ainger, Letters of Charles Lamb. Vol. 1, p.144.

About a year later he wrote to Manning, who was in China. Time having removed some of the sting of failure, Lamb used his imagination and wrote somewhat playfully as follows: "So I go creeping on since I was lamed with the cursed fall from the top of Drury Lane into the pit, something more than a year ago. However, I have been free of the house ever since, and the house was pretty free with me on that occasion. Damn 'em how they hissed! It was not a hiss either, but a sort of a frantic yell, like a congregation of mad geese, with roaring sometimes like bears, mows and mops like apes, sometimes snakes that hissed me into madness."[1]

Elliston wanted to put on the play a second night, but Lamb refused as he thought the failure was due to the slight subject, and, if so, the second night would be as disastrous. Hazlitt in Table Talk says, "How often did I conjure up in my recollections the full diapason of applause at the end of the prologue, and hear my ingenuous friend in the first row of the pit roar with laughter at his own wit."[2] The following criticism on Mr. H was printed in The Monthly Literary Recreation of December, 1806: "This piece met with the fate which it most justly merited. A prologue full of real humor and wit, excellently well delivered by Mr. Elliston, made us hope better things, and we confess that for the first two or three scenes our curiosity was excited; and the first act, owing to the exertions of Mr. Elliston and Miss Mellon went off tolerably smooth, until the last scene. In the second act Mr. H, the hero of the piece who had before concealed his name on account of its

[1] Ainger, Letters of Charles Lamb. Vol. 1, p.151.
[2] P. 232.

disgusting vulgarity, blunders it out himself and the appellation of Hogsflesh is made known and immediately a string of the most stale puns and proverbs are let loose upon it. Here all interest vanished, the audience was disgusted, and the farce went on to its conclusion almost unheard."[1]

Although the play failed the first night, yet it was produced a few times afterward, according to some of Lamb's biographers. There is a reference to its being played in New York three months later, and in Philadelphia in 1812 it had a considerable run.[2] On April 26, 1822 Charles Mathews the younger played the part of Mr. H. at the Theater Royal English Opera House Strand. In 1885 it was presented by a Society of Dramatic Students who compressed it into a single act and contracted the dialogue.[3]

There are different conjectures as to the cause of the failure. Hazlitt thought if it had followed a tragedy instead of an opera the audience would have been in a more receptive mood. Talfourd says the stage had begun to require interest moral or immoral to be interwoven with the web of all its action, and no longer rejoiced in the riot of animal spirits and careless gaity; it no longer permitted wit to take the sting from evil as well as the load from care; but infected even its prince of rakes, Charles Surface, with a cant of sentiment."[4] Brander Matthews thinks the fatal fault was keeping the secret from the spectators. He says,

[1]Dobell, Side Lights on Charles Lamb. p. 339.
[2]Ainger, Works of Charles Lamb. Vol. 2, p.389.
[3]Dircks, Plays and Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb. p.XV.
[4]Craddock, Charles Lamb. p.60.

"To keep a secret is a misconception of true theatrical effect, an improper method of sustaining dramatic suspense. An audience is interested not in what the end may be, but in the means whereby that end is to be reached. . . . If the audience that night had been slyly let into the secret in an early scene, they would have had double enjoyment in watching the futile endeavors of the dramatis personae to divine it, and they would not have been disappointed when Mr. Hogsflesh let slip his full patronymic. Kept in ignorance, the spectators joined the actors in speculation, and when the word was revealed they were not amused by the disgust of the actors, so annoyed were they, that they had been puzzled by a vulgar name."[1]

The failure may have been due partly to the play and partly to the audience. An article by J. E. Babson in the Atlantic Monthly, May 1863, entitled "Charles Lamb's Uncollected Writings," gives some account of a club of "damned authors." He states that no fewer than two tragedies, four comedies, one opera, and three farces suffered at Drury Lane Theater during the season of 1806 and 1807. The audience began to hiss early in the season and "retained through the remainder of the season a relish of blood." Lamb says "Our nonsense did not suit their nonsense."

The farce has the necessary requisites, probable people in possible circumstances with some exaggeration of their foibles and sentiments. It is "whimsical" as Lamb intended it should be. What other causes can be found for its failure than the lateness of the hour, the high expectations of the audience, and the habit

[1]Matthews, Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb. p.27.

which the audience may have acquired, of hissing what did not suit their fancy?

The construction of the plot is too weak even for a whimsical farce. The central idea of the piece -- for one can hardly say action as it is so slight -- is the secret to be revealed of who Mr. H. really is. The audience was expecting a good laugh at the wit of Charles Lamb, and when the name was revealed and it proved to be a somewhat vulgar but common name, the disappointment became disgust, and the audience felt that they themselves had been tricked. They forgot perhaps for the moment that Lamb their favorite was responsible for this foolishness and hissed. Had Hogsflesh been the name of some popular character of the city, it might have made what is termed a local hit, but even then it is too flimsy for the central idea of a farce. The action being so slight, the farce consists mostly of dialogue, some of which is vulgar and common-place. The interest excited at first died out, as there was too much playing with Lamb's favorite toy, the pun. The audience wanted a new idea. But had the play been condensed to a single act by eliminating most of the second act which is mere word play, there is no doubt that it would have met with a reasonable degree of success.

Another defect of the farce is its lack of characterization. An audience likes to discover the foibles of a farcical character by his action and conversation, rather than by hearing a discussion of him by other players or by his own soliloquies. The characters are not discriminated. All of them possess one human foible, an abundance of curiosity -- an excellent one to satirize, as it is universal. The hero is best shown. He is a

gentleman with some fortune, possesses a good figure, is anxious to find a wife, takes much pride in his conversation which in fact is very common-place. He has a bad memory which upset his little game for winning a wife.

Lamb shows lack of skill in handling the catastrophe. When, through forgetfulness, Mr. H. betrays his own secret, the playwright prolongs the dramatic moment by having him repeat the thought the second time. The catastrophe which follows is mere dialogue so drawn out as to cause the play to lose its sparkle and life.

In his exaggeration of ridiculous names Lamb has allowed his imagination and wit to carry him too far. He enumerates names of persons that were names of fishes, birds, beasts, coins, professions, long names and short names. He displays his wit in numerous puns, and introduces numerous terms suggesting hog, in order to make his hero flinch. But it is overdone and wearies the audience. It seems as if Lamb was in the mood for word play, and, while in imagination the speeches were only a moment in length, he had not counted the minutes required to present the thoughts on the stage. The amusement of the author in creating the jokes exceeded the enjoyment of the audience in hearing them. Here his emotion overcame his judgment. He either lacked a psychological knowledge of the theatrical audience, or he was not guided by it, at least.

But with all these faults the play has interest. There is sparkle and wit in the dialogue. The numerous demands for the hero's name and the curiosity aroused is entertaining. Lamb has shown ingenuity in choosing appropriate names as Mrs. Pointer, Mrs.

Setter, and Mrs. Guesswell for the committee to discover the real identity of Mr. H. Some of his puns are clever but others resemble those of our present day vaudeville.

The most entertaining feature is the exaggeration of curiosity. Lamb has expressed the superlative degree of this human foible in Mr. Pry, the landlord, who is complaining of his house being upside down because of the guessing and speculating of the servants as to the identity of Mr. H. While complaining the landlord takes up a box belonging to the hero and displays his own curiosity. This is the only dramatic incident of the play. Mr. Pry says, "I hate such inquisite -- I wonder what is in it? -- it feels heavy, 'Leases, title deeds, wills.' Here, now, a man might satisfy his curiosity at once . . . But I wouldn't -- it is a pretty box too. -- but I'd cut my fingers off before I'd do such a dirty -- what have I to do -- curse the keys, how they rattle! (takes out a bunch and plays with them) I wonder if any of these would fit? One might just try them; but I wouldn't lift up the lid. O Lord! little rusty fits it! but what is that to me? I wouldn't go to -- no, no -- but" (While he is turning up the lid of the box Mr. H. enters behind him unperceived.) As the usual custom in the plays of Lamb's time the offense is forgiven. The landlord excuses himself by declaring he has had a natural curiosity from childhood. He says, "I could never see a cold pie with legs dangling out at the top but my fingers were for lifting up the crust -- just to try if it were pigeon or partridge, -- for no other reason in the world.

In this farce as in the tragedy Lamb has portrayed in the hero some of his own characteristics: Mr. H is interested in music; he is familiar with quotations from authors; the discussion

of his blasted hope of marriage recalls Lamb's "Dream Children"; he loves to swear but is not so adept as Lamb; and he is as forgiving as the author himself. The last sentence of the farce is a characteristic "Lambism," "Hogsflesh has saved his Bacon." Ainger has suggested that it was this speech which probably gave rise to the play.

The pun was characteristic of Lamb's humor. His beloved master made use of it in his earlier plays, but Shakespeare outgrew it in his mature literary life. Lamb, however, remained the "boy" in more ways than one; he always loved the pun. The playfulness of the author in dallying so long with such slight ideas, and the flowing conversation of the dialogue suggests the style of an essayist, rather than the more active, pointed, and abbreviated conversation of a dramatist.

III

The third play was a tragi-comedy entitled The Wife's Trial or The Intruding Widow, founded on Crabbe's tale of The Confidant. This play was written in the summer of 1827, and printed December 1828, in Blackwood's Magazine.

The plot is as follows: The fifth wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Selby finds the home somewhat disturbed by an intruding widow, Mrs. Frampton, a former school-mate, who came to visit Mrs. Selby for a few days but has remained weeks, and shows no intention of leaving. Mr. Selby has discovered that she has some mysterious power over his wife which has reduced her from the attitude of a hostess to that of a cringing servant. He rebels

against this situation and insists upon his wife's requesting the widow to leave. Fearfully she complies with her husband's request but the widow becomes indignant and refuses. Mr. Selby overhears the widow say, "Your husband shall know all this!" He at once suspects his wife's fidelity. When he informs his sister Lucy of the situation, she suggests that he cajole the widow into telling the secret by pretensions of love. Mrs. Frampton falls into the snare without much hesitation. According to her story Mrs. Selby has been secretly married as a schoolgirl, though her husband left her at the church door and had died abroad. The widow withholds however the knowledge of his death. When Mr. Selby relates the secret to Lucy, she recalls a letter received by Katherine his wife, shortly after the marriage, and Mr. Selby remembers that it conveyed the news of the death of some friend, as yet unconfirmed. They decide that the young husband and dead friend are the same. Mr. Selby leads the widow on to disclose the name, which proves their conjecture is right. The husband and wife are reconciled and the widow is forgiven.

This is the slightest of Lamb's plays as it is entirely wanting in dramatic action. Lamb was aware of this defect as he wrote to Mrs. Shelley, "I am writing a farce in two acts; the incidents are tragi-comic. I can do the dialogue; but the damned plot, I believe I must admit altogether. The scenes come after one another like geese, not marshalling like cranes on a Hyde Park Review. The story is as simple as G(eorge) D(yer), and the language plain as his spouse. The characters are three women to one man; which is one more than laid hold on him in Evangely . . . I want some Howard Paine to sketch a skeleton of artfully succeeding

scenes through a whole play as the courses are arranged in a cook book: I to find wit, passion, sentiment, character and the like trifles; to lay in the dead colors -- I'd Titianesque 'em up; to mark the channel in a cheek, and where tears should course I'd draw the waters down; to say where a joke should come in or a pun be left out; to bring my *personae* on and off like Bean Nash; and I'd Frankenstein them there; to bring three on the stage at once; they are so shy with me, that I can get no more than two; and there they stand till it is the time without being the season, to withdraw them."[1]

Lamb did leave the plot out as far as motive and dramatic action is concerned. In the beginning of the play the motive of jealousy is suggested. Had Mr. Selby carried on a flirtation with the widow in order to arouse his wife's jealousy and hasten the departure of the intruder the play would have had dramatic interest. As in *Mr. H.* the secret is too slight for dramatic value. Only a sentimental creature would endure the tyrannical widow for fear of its being exposed. After the secret is disclosed, Mr. Selby tries to arouse his wife's jealousy, when it has no purpose in securing dramatic action.

The characters are merely interlocutors informing the audience what has happened behind the scenes. Mr. Selby refers to the widow's power over his wife thus,

> "Katherine's meek
> And gentle spirit cowers beneath her eye
> As spell bound by some witch."

[1]Macdonald, *Works of Charles Lamb*. Vol. 2, p.175.

Such a scene would be interesting and arouse some sympathy for Katherine. The audience would be entertained by the actions of the widow as Mr. Selby describes them.

> "Sometimes I have thought
> A secret glance would tell me she could love
> If I but gave encouragement."

The characters of the play are weak and puling sort of creatures. Katherine is a meek, tearful, sentimental wife at the beginning of the play and continues so to the end. She lacks the independence and will of Margaret in John Woodvil, Margaret commanded our sympathy but Katherine does not. The character of the widow is better delineated. She is a bold, imperious, and assuming; somewhat affected and coquettish. She is near the verge of immorality as Mr. Selby describes her,

> "She rests prepared, as mistress or as wife
> To seize the place of her betrayed friend."

She is stupid in telling her secret so readily, and in believing Mr. Selby's attitude had changed toward her so quickly. One is not convinced of her penitence although Mr. Selby says at the close that he reads "penitence on her dejected brow." Mr. Selby is weak in suspecting his wife's fidelity on such a slight foundation. Lucy is a mere tool which the playwright uses to explain situations.

Although the play is written in blank verse, yet it should have been in prose. The thought and diction do not possess poetic beauty or sublimity. The following is a very common greeting with some affectation.

"Be seated. For your brother's sake you are welcome.
I had thought this day to have spent in homely fashion,
With the good couple to whose hospitality
I stand so far indebted. But your coming
Makes it a feast."

Let us test this verse by applying the touchstone of Shakespeare. In speaking of the unfaithfulness of his wife Mr. Selby says,

"I begin
To call in doubt the course of her life past
Under my eyes. She hath not been good
Not virtuous, nor discreet."

Othello says of Desdemona,

"She's gone. I am abus'd; and my relief
Must be to loathe her."[1]

Lamb has put the burden of the drama on the dialogue which consists principally of narration and description. He has told a story, but as a dramatist he should have motivated action, and portrayed his charactersand scenes, through dramatic action and terse, pointed dialogue.

The Wife's Tragedy is colored by the sentimentality of the time. The play lacks the poetical passages we found in John Woodvil, and the wit in Mr. H. The Lambisms are scarcely seen, but the love of emotion which he tried but failed to express -- "the channels where the tears should course" -- is the marked characteristic of Lamb in this play. It is the most impersonal and also the least interesting of his plays.

[1]Act 3, sc. 3.

IV

The Pawnbroker's Daughter, a farce in two acts written in 1829, was Lamb's last attempt as a dramatist. It was never presented on the stage. Lamb appealed to Elliston, who was then manager of Surrey Theater, to produce it, but he replied that it would not be suited to the interest of the theater. According to some of Lamb's biographers Lamb had expected it to be performed at the Haymarket,[1] and had submitted it to Charles Matthews at the Adelphi Theater.[2] The farce was printed in January 1830, in Blackwood's Magazine, but it was never reprinted by Lamb, and Ainger omitted it in his edition of Lamb's works.

The farce is founded upon the essay "On the Inconveniences of Being Hanged." The plot is not quite so slight as Mr. H, for this play has two romances somewhat interwoven. Marian, the daughter of Flint the pawnbroker, is wooed by Davenport of the gentry, against the wishes of her father who is determined she shall not marry to be twitted afterward of her low estate. He plans for her to marry one of his choice. Through a trick of her maid, Marian is rushed away by her lover during the absence of her father. In her excitement she carries with her a box of jewels placed in her care. Davenport finds lodging for her in Cutlet the butcher's house, where she occupies an apartment with Miss Flyn, whose lover Pendulous has just escaped death by hanging, news of his innocence coming two minutes after he was hung. Pendulous is grieved over

[1] Lucas, Life of Charles Lamb. Vol. 2, p. 153.
[2] Thomson, Bibliography of Charles and Mary Lamb. p.102.

the disgrace and feels that no lady could accept him. Miss Flyn resolves to commit some deed which will bring her to justice, hoping the disgrace will produce a bond of sympathy with her lover, by reducing herself to the same level. Her plan soon materializes. Just as she arrives at this conclusion, an officer, sent by the pawnbroker to arrest his daughter for stealing the jewels, enters and finds Miss Flyn holding the jewel casket intrusted to her, by Marian during her absence. When Miss Flyn is brought before the court, Flint declares she is not his daughter. She will make no explanation but asks them to send for Pendulous. He comes and offers to answer for her with his life and fortune. At this point, Marian rushes in, falls at her father's feet and begs his forgiveness. The father relents and all are happy.

This play failed as did the others, because of the lack of dramatic action. It is an artificial, motiveless, and conventional farce. It is less extravagant in verbal wit than Mr. H. but it is also less entertaining in wit on account of the absence of imaginative qualities. The dialogue moves more rapidly, thanks to the many short speeches. The audience enjoys the dialogue at times because they are informed of the situation, before it is known by all the characters. Betty the maid knows nothing of Pendulous being hanged, but she says to Miss Flyn, "He has not had a fall or tumble has he?" and "If his neck is whole his heart is too."

Lamb has indulged himself as usual in word play. When Cutlet complains that he cannot sleep because of his thinking, Lucy the maid replies "And what may be the subject of your Night Thoughts?" thus playing upon the title of Young's poem. He has

shown his caprice in choosing names for the characters: Flint for the pawnbroker, Cutlet for the butcher, and Pendulous for the man hanged. Lamb has also indulged himself in the use of the paradox. He reverses the tendency of society: instead of scheming to marry his daughter above her rank, the pawnbroker refuses such an alliance; instead of ignoring or ostracizing a disgraced person, Miss Flyn plans to commit a crime in order to create a bond of love. We are introduced to Cutlet pouring over the sentimental verse,

> "The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed today
> Had he thy reason would be sport and play?
> Pleased to the last he crops his flowery food,
> And licks the hand just raised to shed its blood."

Then he throws aside his book and rushes to sell a saddle of mutton. The pawnbroker's business is a paradox. It is beneficient in loaning money to those in dire circumstances, it is harsh in the tooth-and-claw method by which it succeeds.

As in John Woodvil, Lamb has portrayed the characters as romanticists. The pawnbroker engages in a business in which fortune's wheel sometimes stops at his number, truly a romantic business. He has a temperamental disposition. When in a bad mood, Marian can sooth him with music. At times he feels like a poet, and expresses himself in an artificial manner as, "You shall ride in a gilded chariot upon the necks of these poor, Marian. Their tears shall drop pearls for my girl." He is extreme in his emotions toward his daughter. In the beginning of the play he is affectionate, begging a kiss; after she elopes taking the jewels, he denounces her as a thief, and orders a warrant for her arrest, saying, "I am rock, absolute rock." His extreme emotion causes his

strength to fail and he exclaims, "What is it that makes my legs to fail, and my whole frame to totter thus?" After the jewels are regained the dramatically dashes them to the floor exclaiming, "Was it in the power of these pale splendors to dazzle the sight of honesty, to put out the regardful eye of pity and daughter love?"

Cutlet is even more romantic. He feels that his "trembling sensibility" is not adapted to his business, and wishes he might have sold gloves and lace. He enjoys emotions. He says, "I would not exchange this luxury of unavailing pity for the world." He inquires of Pendulous if he kept a journal of his emotions when he was hanged. He thinks that his "nerves" are due to his highly developed mind. He remarks, "I believe I must not think so deeply, common people that don't reason know nothing of these aberrations." He recites,

> "Great wits go mad, and small ones only dull;
> Distracting cares vex not the empty skull:
> They seize on heads that think,and hearts that feel
> As flies attack the -- better sort of veal."

He is extremely sentimental in his feelings toward animals as he continues his poetry:

> "Yet still I keep my feeling ways,
> And leave the town on slaughtering days,
> At Kentish Town or High Gate Hill,
> I sit, retired beside some rill;
> And tears bedew my glistening eyes
> To think my playful lambs must die."

As the usual thing in Lamb's writing he has given us flash lights of himself now and then. His literary bent is seen in his reference to Night Thoughts, to Pope's verse, and to Buckingham's speech. His capricious style is noted in the many

paradoxes he has conceived. Cutlett possesses several of Lamb's well-known characteristics; the enjoyment of emotion, his imagination, his "nerves" and "trembling sensibility"; his dislike for his business; his love of poetry; and his humorous verse.

We have discussed at some length each of Lamb's plays. We have noted that the characters as well as their master have been trained in the romantic school of expression. The features he admired in the Grand Master Shakespeare he has taught them to imitate. Some of his characters are heard discoursing on the wonders of imagination; some have learned to juggle and play with words; some are discussing their strange emotions with great joy and satisfaction; and some are sentimental. All have been assigned some part in a romantic incident or adventure, yet they have never learned the art of acting. They prefer to discuss their emotions and relate their experiences rather than display them before an audience. The master himself is displeased with them and says they come on the stage "after one another like geese." Why have they failed?

Why did Lamb fail? During a period of thirty years he produced only four plays, one of which was accepted for acting and it was "damned" at its first appearance. Yet during these thirty years Lamb was a regular attendant at the theater, and was reading the dramas of the old masters. But while he gave himself to the enjoyment of emotions and to the beauty of the dialogue, he did not seem to give attention to their foundation structure. The cause of his failure is adequately expressed by Arnold. He says, "Shakespeare

had the gift of ingenious expression eminent and unrivalled, so eminent as irresistibly to strike the attention in him, and even to throw into comparative shade his other excellencies as a poet (which were his fundamental excellencies as a poet.) . . . these attractive accessories of a poetical work being more easily seized than the spirit of the whole . . . A young writer having recourse to Shakespeare as his model runs risk of being vanquished and absorbed by them, . . . and in consequence reproducing these and these alone."[1]

But the constructive genius of a dramatist was not among the talents bestowed upon Lamb. He lacked the faculty of mind which sees the parts in their relation to the whole. He saw only the parts. The genius who could make his reputation in literature, in an essay on the "Dissertation on Roast Pig" did not have the faculty for portraying the human soul in trying situations, in its conflict of passion and duty.

But there is another cause for Lamb's failure. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, there was neither a national glow of life and thought such as existed in the time of Shakespeare, nor was there the learning and criticism that was found at this time in Germany. Lamb had neither the materials nor the atmosphere conducive to the creation of dramatic poetry, even though he had possessed the natural ability. The dramatists of Lamb's period, therefore, played an insignificant part in English literature.

[1]Arnold, Poems, "Preface" p. x.

CONCLUSION

It has been the aim of this thesis to show Lamb as a representative of the Romantic school, by discussing his relation to the stage. In the three chapters we have discussed his life, his dramatic criticism, and his plays. We have discovered the native elements of the man; imagination, emotion, sympathy, a subjective mind, and an antiquarian spirit, which are characteristics of his group.

These native qualities together with his acquirements prepared him for the work of a critic, a critic of the romantic method, one who depended upon his own sensibility, and conveyed the charm he felt under the spell of the Old Actors or Elizabethan Dramatists. He was an impressionistic critic.

His criticisms brought him in touch with the actors and dramatists of his day. They sought his criticism. His comments on the actors in which he pointed to the superior qualities of imagination, emotion, and intelligence; and his principle of illusion by which he judged acting, are valuable notes to those seeking success in the theatrical world. But in searching through the old manuscripts of the Elizabethan dramatists and pointing out the superior qualities of Shakespeare's plays in comparison with those of the other dramatists, yet giving credit to their excellencies as well, his work has been of most value to the stage.

Where Lamb could use his native qualities he succeeded, but where he sought to imitate others he failed. Where emotion,

imagination, and a subjective mind were essential qualities for the work he succeeded; but where order of mind, constructive power, and impersonal expression were required he failed. Therefore as a dramatist he failed, but as a critic he possessed the necessary qualities to appreciate a "great work" and convey its charm to others. It was as an impressionistic critic that Lamb played the most important part in his relation to the stage.

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